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SUBJECT: ARGENTINA: CHIEF JUSTICE TO SEEK JUDICIAL
COOPERATION ON DC TRIP OCTOBER 1-5

¶1. (SBU) Summary: The Ambassador met with Argentine Supreme Court President Ricardo Lorenzetti, on the eve of his first official visit to Washington, to discuss his agenda and judicial reform in Argentina. Lorenzetti shared the details of his October 1-5 Washington schedule and his hope to promote a pan-American conference on judicial independence and rule of law. The Ambassador and Lorenzetti agreed on the many similarities the Argentina and U.S. constitutions and judicial systems share and on the existence of a strong basis for cooperation. Lorenzetti highlighted that his scheduled meeting with Chief Justice John Roberts will be the first time the chief justices of Argentina and the U.S. meet. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) On September 27, the Ambassador met with Argentine Supreme Court President Ricardo Lorenzetti, on the eve of his first official visit to Washington, to discuss his agenda and judicial reform in Argentina. Lorenzetti shared the details of his October 1-5 Washington schedule. He is scheduled to attend a session of oral arguments before the U.S. Supreme Court on October 2, followed by a private meeting with Chief Justice John Roberts, Justice Samuel Alito, Justice Stephen Breyer, and Justice Antonin Scalia. Lorenzetti will also meet privately with OAS Secretary General Jose Insulza on the 2nd. On October 3, Lorenzetti will visit the Georgetown School of Law and have lunch with Argentine Ambassador Jose Bordon. On October 4, Lorenzetti will meet with Director General of the Federal Judicial Center Judge Barbara Rothstein and travel to Baltimore to visit the University of Maryland School of Law. Lorenzetti is scheduled to visit Philadelphia October 5th, meeting the former director of the American Law Institute, Professor Geoffrey Hazard. Lorenzetti mentioned that he will visit the National Archives. Other possible meetings that were requested but not confirmed as of September 28 include:

- interviews with international correspondents of Argentine dailies Clarin and La Nacion;
- a meeting with Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi;
- a visit to the Library of Congress;
- a visit to the National Endowment for Democracy; and
- and a meeting at the Argentine Embassy with members of the Center for Argentine Students and Graduates (CEGA).

13. (SBU) Lorenzetti said he hopes to promote while in Washington a pan-American conference on judicial independence and rule of law. He said the U.S. Supreme Court, with the help of USAID, held such a conference in 1995 and that there was one follow-up meeting in Panama in 1997. Lorenzetti showed Ambassador the conference report that named the participating countries, themes covered, and conclusions of the conference. He said he would propose hosting in Buenos Aires another iteration of the 1995 conference next year. He would like the conference to focus on fortifying judicial independence and rule of law in the Americas.

14. (SBU) Lorenzetti explained that he is trying to promote annual judicial conferences within Argentina. The Ambassador congratulated Lorenzetti on the August judicial conference in Salta province. Lorenzetti said that it was a very successful conference which addressed the most important judicial issues in Argentina, including modernization of the court system, timeliness of trials, and budgeting. Lorenzetti did not comment on his recent dispute in the press with Justice Minister Alberto Iribarne over increasing the Supreme Court's budget except to say that more funds are needed for technology to improve the efficiency of judicial proceedings. (Lorenzetti asked the administration for 2.3 billion pesos for 2008 -- a 50% increase over current funding and 600 million pesos over the cap designated by the Ministry of Economy. Lorenzetti claims that 90% of the current budget goes to pay salaries and that a budget increase would allow him to modernize and improve the justice system. Iribarne said the judicial budget has doubled in the last four years.)

15. (SBU) On the judicial reform bill currently before the Argentine Congress, Lorenzetti said the bill will significantly contribute to improving the justice system. He said the bill will introduce specific timetables for trials and establish modern criteria. Lorenzetti said that the bill was accepted by all of the federal judges.

16. (SBU) Lorenzetti's U.S. discussions will also focus in part on helping Argentina develop a system as exists in the U.S. for describing case law to encourage more consistency in judicial decisions.

Biographic Information

17. (SBU) Ricardo Lorenzetti, born September 19, 1955, was appointed to the Argentine Supreme Court by President Kirchner in December 2004 and became Chief Justice in November 2006. Lorenzetti was born in Santa Fe province and became a lawyer in 1978. He has also taught law in Santa Fe and in Buenos Aires at the University of Belgrano. He said his specialization is commercial law. He speaks English and spent some time at the post graduate level in Austin, Texas. He appears sincerely dedicated to modernizing the Argentine justice system and to augmenting the legitimacy of the Supreme Court in public opinion.

Comment

18. (SBU) Lorenzetti said he hopes that his visit to Washington will result in the planning of a Pan-American judicial conference in Buenos Aires next year. He said he admires the professionalism and authority of the U.S. Supreme Court and hopes the conference would present an opportunity to learn from the U.S. justice system. He said Argentina is working to change the role of the judicial system in society, but that it is not Argentine tradition to follow precedents established by the rulings and opinions of the country's highest court. Lorenzetti's visit presents an opportunity to engage the Argentine judicial system on increased cooperation and exchanges. END COMMENT.

WAYNE